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Testimony for Public Hearing

Higher Education and Advancement Committee

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S.B. 1108 An Act Concerning Access to Reproductive Health Care by College Students at Public Institutions of Higher Education.

Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, and esteemed members of the Higher Education and Advancement Committee my name is Liz Gustafson, and I am the State Director of Pro-Choice Connecticut. **Thank you for accepting this testimony in support of S.B. 1108 An Act Concerning Access to Reproductive Health Care by College Students at Public Institutions of Higher Education.**

As a leading advocate for reproductive freedom in the state, Pro-Choice Connecticut believes that healthcare is a human right, and everyone deserves access to healthcare regardless of their age, race, gender identity, sexuality, zip code, immigration or economic status. In the months following the United States Supreme Court decision to overturn precedent set by *Roe*, abortion access has been decimated across the country— as a total of eighteen states have either banned or severely restricted abortion access, with additional states likely to implement bans in the months to come.

Abortion access in the United States has long been inequitable, due in large part to systemic racism and insufficient protections for low-income individuals- which has led to insurmountable barriers for young people, Black, Latino, and Indigenous people, the LGBTQ+ community, and people living with disabilities. Even in states such as Connecticut where abortion remains legal - it is abundantly clear that legality has never equaled access. **As a state that continues to lead on behalf of reproductive freedom, it is paramount that we invest in solutions that increase equitable access to abortion and pregnancy-related care for students through policies such as S.B. 1108.**

In the 2020-2021 academic year, Connecticut had 99,351 students enrolled in the state's higher education system, and according to National Student Clearinghouse enrollment data, students who identify as women made up an all time high of 59.9% of college students¹. College students with limited time, resources, and transportation, and especially those living in access deserts, have to overcome significant barriers to access the care they need. Additionally, due to a number of factors, university health centers may have limited capacity to adequately meet the needs of enrolled students- underscoring the need for standardized protocols at institutions of higher education to ensure the appropriate referrals are made to licensed health care providers.

While longstanding federal laws like Title IX protect pregnant and parenting students from discrimination and require leaves of absence in certain cases²- more must be done to ensure students' ability to access

¹ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

² <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-pregnancy-resource.pdf>

time-sensitive and essential reproductive health care they need. Additionally, college students are already balancing the extreme costs of higher education and often end up in significant debt to pay for it– and if faced with an unplanned pregnancy, students should be provided with practical support (such as travel), and institutions of higher education must ensure adequate protection of student privacy related to pregnancy – including the termination of a pregnancy. This is a matter of racial, economic, and gender justice. Research shows that being denied an abortion can have devastating economic consequences and drive people deeper into poverty³, as well as significantly impact an individual's mental health and physical well being. We must support college students in our state, and ensure they can access the comprehensive reproductive health care they need, regardless of where they go to school or how much money they have.

Anyone who is seeking abortion, contraception, and pregnancy-related care should be able to access timely, compassionate, affordable, and quality care from a licensed medical provider. S.B. 1108 would increase student's ability to control their health, their lives, and their futures, and would require public institutions of higher education to establish a plan to ensure students can efficiently and effectively access the care, resources and health care services they need. We would ask the committee to amend bill language Section 2 (b) (2) to ensure that the provision of referrals for and transportation services to access reproductive health care services at any off-campus location reference licensed medical provider. This will help ensure students are receiving medically accurate, non judgemental, comprehensive health care options.

An investment in the reproductive health of college students is an investment in the future of Connecticut. S.B. 1108 would increase students' ability to exercise their bodily autonomy, receive accurate medical information from a licensed medical provider, make informed decisions about their reproductive lives, and continue pursuing their educational and career goals without barriers, stigma, or outside interference. Pro-Choice Connecticut urges the committee to support S.B. 1108, with amended language.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Liz Gustafson
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³ <https://www.ansirh.org/research/sheet/harms-denying-woman-wanted-abortion>